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This essay discusses Japan's struggle to push its military capabilities to become more active in security issues since the reelection of Shinzo Abe in 2012. During this time, Japanese defense policy faced great challenges due to the restriction of the Japanese constitution of pacifism (Article 9) and the fact that the Japanese opposed the idea of militarism or 'remilitarization' initiated by Japanese political leaders, mainly Abe. However, the Chinese military presence in the region with overwhelming military capabilities and aggressive behavior, particularly around Diaoyu/Senkaku islands in the East China Sea, threatens Japan. This uncertainty has engendered a grim perception of China among the Japanese which forces Japan to fortify its security by reforming its defense policy to strengthen its military capabilities. In this essay, I argue that the remilitarization of Japan is stimulated by the Japanese perception of the threat of Chinese aggressiveness. By utilizing Robert Jervis's theory, the analysis is focused on a structural level to trace the incentive of Japan's remilitarization. This security phenomenon will be enlightened by two imperative concepts of the security dilemma and perception of threat. Other domestic aspects like public opinion and elites are discussed to show the veracity of the main argument.

Keywords: Japan, Military Capabilities, Security Dilemma, Remilitarization, Threat Perception.

Introduction

This article discusses the remilitarization of Japan that is influenced by Japan's perception of China's threat. This article uses Robert Jervis' theories of security dilemma and perception of threat as the main tool of analysis to explain Japan's perception of threat. To further strengthen the analysis, this article will also look at internal factors, notably political elites and public opinion, as indicators for the perception of threat itself.

When Shinzo Abe became the Prime Minister of Japan in 2012, he tried to make major changes in Japan's defense policy by trying to revise Japan's

constitution¹ and increasing its military budget. However, he faced opposition from the Japanese public, who believed that Japan should be truly pacifist and opposed remilitarization due to the trauma from the Second World War.

Abe's vision faces challenges from the Japanese public as they are more supportive of Japanese pacifism and reject militarism, largely due to the trauma of the war. However, why does Japan tend to push for policies that lead to remilitarization? This drive is caused by international structural motives, namely the threat of China. As for domestic factors such as political elites and public opinion towards Japan's remilitarization, they only have a certain level of influence.

The aim of this article is to explain the main motives behind Japan's push for remilitarization. The article explains that Japan sees the rise of China as a threat and considers it the main motivation for remilitarization. There are domestic motives, such as the influence of elites who do have dominance in policymaking, with the dominant position of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan's domestic politics, but it is not a strong reason. The reason is that even though policymaking is concentrated among those in strategic positions and with dominance in politics (political elites) (Mahendra, 2009, p. 43), it is not entirely true because even after Japan's leadership transition that occurred in 2020 when Shinzo Abe was succeeded by Yoshihide Suga, Japan's remains committed to remilitarization.

Additionally, policymakers tend to act according to the vulnerabilities they perceive or the magnitude of the threats they face (Jervis, 1978, p. 174). In this case, Japanese elites are trying to enhance defense capabilities due to the threat they face, namely the increasing power of China. Other domestic motives such as public opinion actually validate the threat posed by China because as China's threat increases in the region, public perception of China in Japan worsens, leading the Japanese public to support the strengthening of Japan's military capabilities as a defense against China. The drastic change in public opinion from

¹ The ideology of Abe's revisionism stems from the pre-war colonial tradition and wartime period, aiming to assert Japan's position as a major leader in Asia and shift away from the post-war passive doctrine. Thus, constitutional revision (particularly Article 9) is an important goal for revisionists to legitimize Japanese militarism (Hughes, 2015, p. 8).

the era of Shinzo Abe to Fumio Kishida strengthens the argument that the increasing aggression of China is also felt by the Japanese public. Therefore, despite the traumatic history of militarism, the Japanese public tends to support the increase in Japan's military capabilities for the purpose of defense against China (Galic, 2022).

Therefore, it is clear that the motive for Japan's remilitarization is due to the threat posed by China. Based on the concept of the *security dilemma*, the increase in one country's security will threaten the security of other countries, thereby provoking them to enhance their own security (Jervis, 1978, p. 170). This means that any increase in China's military power will threaten Japan's security and provoke Japan to strengthen its military capabilities. Thus, every country will continue to adjust its security due to the perceived vulnerability from other countries, resulting from the effects of the *security dilemma*, which leads to an ongoing increase in security requirements due to the reciprocal nature of the *security dilemma* (Jervis, 1978, p. 182). Jervis emphasizes that the increase in one country's security makes other countries less secure, not because of misperception or created hostility, but because of the anarchic nature of the international structure. Even if a country is convinced that the current intentions of other countries are peaceful, they will not ignore the possibility that others may become aggressive in the future. However, if a country views another country as an enemy, it will react more aggressively than a country that perceives the world normally.²

This situation can worsen based on Jervis' assumption that the perception of threat is an estimation of whether the other party will cooperate or not. If the other party is perceived as unlikely to cooperate, they are seen as a threat, and vice versa. This means that Japan regards China as a threat because China is perceived as unlikely to cooperate; in short, China is seen as an enemy of Japan. Jervis' theory, which focuses on the perception of threat as an important aspect in determining the threatening party for a country, also determines a country's response to that threat. Jervis adds that a country that views another country as

² In this case, although the security dilemma is a direct impact of the anarchy structure, the threat perception is also an important factor that can exacerbate the impact of the security dilemma.

an enemy will react more aggressively and responsively compared to viewing the world normally (Jervis, 1978). Therefore, it is not surprising that the increasing power of China leads Japan to react more aggressively and responsively through remilitarization.

Furthermore, due to the detrimental effects of the security dilemma and perception of threat, distrust arises, causing defensive postures to be seen as offensive. As stated by Jervis, if defensive and offensive postures cannot be distinguished, and offensive incentives have advantages due to military technological advancements, the future situation will be highly problematic. This will lead to a dominant incentive for attacking and potentially trigger an arms race that can lead to conflicts (Jervis, 1978, p. 211). However, since Japan's remilitarization is defensive in nature, the future situation, which may seem so dire due to the lack of incentives for escalation, is mitigated.

This article will explore the main motivations for Japan's remilitarization through a comparison between structural and domestic motives, as well as the impact of Japan's remilitarization on its relationship with China

Structural Motive

Security Dilemma

This article states that the main motive behind Japan's remilitarization is the threat from China. The increasing military power of China poses a threat to Japan's security, which provokes Japan to enhance its military strength in response. The process of strengthening Japan's military power is divided into two dimensions: external and internal.

First, Japan has security guarantees from the United States, which is a major external power or ally. However, US involvement in Japan and East Asia has decreased since the era of Donald Trump, triggering a resurgence of the long-standing political spectrum of "independent defense policy" among Japanese politicians, especially during the Abe era. This is based on the consideration that Trump's "America First" policy tended to make the US more focused on domestic issues, such as economic growth. As a result, US involvement in East Asian

security issues and, especially, in dealing with China has diminished since the Trump era (Fukushima & Samuels, 2018).

However, under the administration of Joe Biden, the US pays more attention to the East Asian region. In September 2020, Shinzo Abe resigned as the Prime Minister of Japan for health reasons, and Yoshihide Suga (from the LDP faction) replaced Abe as the Prime Minister of Japan (Bartlett, 2020). On April 16, 2021, Yoshihide Suga and Joe Biden held a meeting in Washington, DC. During the meeting, Suga and Biden emphasized their commitment to limiting China's attempts to change the regional status quo by force, particularly in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. This meeting had a positive impact on US commitment to East Asia and Japan. Therefore, Japan can rely on the capabilities of the US if China escalates tensions. On the flip side, Japan's position for the US is crucial in maintaining the balance in the Asia-Pacific region. This is supported by Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) policy, which aims to maintain order and enhance security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, especially with the US, Australia, and India (members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: the Quad) (Koga, 2022). Japan's efforts to enhance its military power are supported by allies, especially the US, not only to strengthen Japan's internal security but also to increase allies' commitment to Japan in the future, as Japan's power becomes increasingly important for allies' interests in the Asia-Pacific (Hatoyama, 2021).

After Fumio Kishida assumed the position of Prime Minister of Japan, Abe's ideological legacy did not fade away. The desire to strengthen military power increased. In December 2022, the Japanese government approved a massive increase in military spending (discussed in more detail in subsequent discussions), followed by Fumio Kishida's diplomatic trips to allied countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Canada), mostly addressing security issues in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific. These diplomatic trips aim to strengthen allies' commitment to security in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific, as well as to open up opportunities for more comprehensive military cooperation in terms of arms supply, military infrastructure, and joint military exercises (Herydarian, 2023). This demonstrates Japan's willingness to strengthen

its defense system through military cooperation, in line with the increase and reform of its domestic defense system.

Since Japan describes China as the main threat to its national security, the development of its military defense system is built in accordance with the Chinese threat. In the internal defense system, there is a similarity in the focus on military enhancement between China and Japan. Both countries are more focused on expanding and strengthening their military capabilities in the maritime and air domains (in response to disputes in the East China Sea region where these domains are crucial). However, it should be noted that the expansion of the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) is not yet comparable to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) due to limitations imposed by Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. The military power gap between China and Japan is also one of the reasons that reinforce why Japan needs to strengthen its military.

In the maritime domain, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is currently the largest navy in the world. Gradually, the PLAN has shifted its operational strategy focus from "offshore waters defense" to a combination of "offshore waters defense" and "open-seas protection," which greatly supports the PLAN in conducting strategic operations far beyond China's territorial waters, including entering Japanese territory. On the other hand, the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) is also the largest air force in the Asian region and has begun to shift its strategic task focus from territorial air defense towards tasks that are both defensive and offensive in nature. This means that the military operations orientation of the PLAAF will also be aggressive. Furthermore, in 2017, the PLAAF underwent organizational restructuring to support tasks in regions far from mainland China or long-range air power projection. Through the expansion of tasks and the offensive orientation of the PLAAF and PLAN, it is evident that China will be more assertive in securing its interests and ambitions in the region, particularly in the maritime and air domains (Mastro, 2019).

In response, the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) in 2013 and the Mid-Term Defense Program (MTDP) for 2019-2023 explain a strategy that prioritizes defense enhancement in the maritime and air domains, known as the "*dynamic joint defense force*" strategy (H. Andrew Schwartz, 2019). This

indicates that Japan's military strategy is built to anticipate China's military aggressiveness in the maritime and air areas surrounding the East Asian region. In December 2022, Japan renewed its National Security Strategy (NSS), wherein the document emphasized that China is the primary threat to Japan's national interests. Furthermore, to strengthen the deterrence effect of the system, Japan has approved the use of counterstrike capabilities, allowing Japan to launch retaliatory attacks in the event of aggression. In a defensive defense system, deterrence is crucial, and considering the modernization of missile technology by countries in the East Asian region, particularly China, along with the increasingly militarized environment in the region, Japan's decision becomes highly rational (Japan Ministry of Defense, 2022).

This tendency, analyzed within the security dilemma, actually represents a positive action that demonstrates Japanese military strategists' understanding of the security dilemma's conditions. If we only consider the basic assumptions of the security dilemma theory, Japan's security requirements would be difficult to fulfill and could result in an arms race. Therefore, Japan adjusts the level of security necessary to counter China's threat, rather than solely focusing on overall military expansion. Although Japan's approval of counterstrike capabilities has received criticism from several countries, especially China, Russia, and North Korea, Japan's allied nations support this decision (Herydarian, 2023). The development of Japan's military defense system becomes an essential asset for playing its role in the Asia-Pacific region and will also strengthen allies' commitment to Japan and the Asia-Pacific region.

Japan's Perceptions of the Threat from China

A country cannot determine the intentions behind another country's military power increase. This reality often leads to miscalculations by many countries. To explain this, the perception of the threat will be discussed in this section. According to Jervis, the "perception of threat" occurs when another party is perceived as uncooperative, leading to it being viewed as a threat (Jervis, 1978, p. 170). In this case, Japan perceives China as a threat because it sees China as uncooperative. China's uncooperative stance can be observed through disputes in the East China Sea region (Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands), the historical relationship

between Japan and China, and the Japanese public's opinion on territorial disputes.

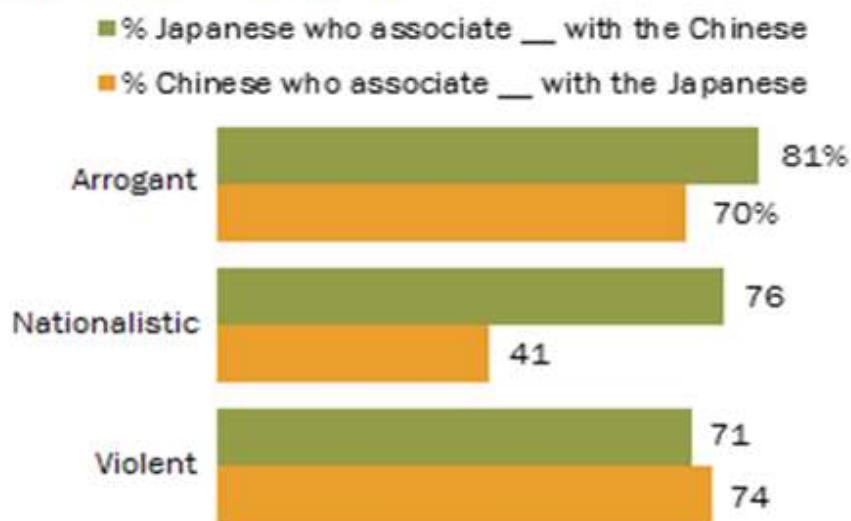
Tensions between China and Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands have escalated since Japan's nationalization of the islands, triggering China's reactions. Since then, China has continuously deployed its military forces to secure the waters, initiating the "East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)" in PLAN operations and "regulators patrols" in PLAAF operations to strengthen China's position in the region. This clearly makes Japan feel that China's aggressive actions threaten its national interests, as emphasized in Japan's 2022 Defense White Paper, which states that China is Japan's primary security threat (Japan Ministry of Defense, 2022). However, Japan has previously made diplomatic efforts to address the issue. For example, in 2013, Japan called for negotiations with China on several occasions and held a meeting in 2015. However, these efforts did not reduce China's aggressive activities in the region. This indicates China's uncertainty, as Japan's diplomatic efforts did not yield results, despite China's seemingly peaceful responses through the media.

The annual report of the Japan Ministry of Defense shows that China's military activities in the vicinity of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands have been fluctuating but consistently high until 2022. In 2020, the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) conducted activities around the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands for a total of 333 days (the highest number), while PLAAF activities in the vicinity of Japan were highest in 2016, with 851 instances, slightly decreasing to 722 instances in 2021. On the other hand, China also conducted military exercises with Russia in Japanese waters in October 2021, and then in May 2022, both countries conducted joint long-range flights across Japanese airspace and the Pacific Ocean (Japan Ministry of Defense, 2022). China's consistent military activities in the vicinity of Japan indicates China's uncertainty and aggression in the region, indirectly signaling to Japan that China is not stopping its militarization of the area and is pursuing its ambitious projects as a great power.

The disputes in the border areas between China and Japan also contribute to the negative perception of China among the Japanese public. According to a survey conducted by the Genron NPO in 2021 on the reasons for the Japanese

public's dislike of China and vice versa, 57% of the Japanese public stated that conflicts in the Diaoyu/Senkaku waters were the primary reason. Furthermore, in response to a different question about "why the Japanese public sees China's military as a threat," 71% of the Japanese public stated that it was because "China frequently violates Japanese territorial waters." This means that the disputes around the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands are a significant factor shaping the Japanese public's perception (The Genron NPO, 2021). Another survey by the Cabinet Office regarding the Japanese public's assumptions about the conflicts around the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands showed that the majority of the public responded, "In recent years, the Chinese government has repeatedly sent its ships to the waters around the Senkaku Islands and has repeatedly taken actions such as invading those waters" (Japan Cabinet Office, 2019). This statement explicitly indicates that the Japanese public feels invaded by China's actions in the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. In short, the Japanese public feels threatened by China's aggressive activities in that area.

Graphic 1. Japanese and Chinese Public Opinion on Nationalism
Japanese and Chinese differ most over who is nationalistic



Source: (Stokes, 2016)

Historically, disputes between China and Japan have been long-standing. According to a survey by the Pew Research Center in 2016, the history of the First and Second Sino-Japanese Wars has been one of the factors contributing to the

deteriorating relationship between the two countries. Consequently, both countries still hold grudges that generate negative sentiments such as nationalism, arrogance, and hostility. These negative sentiments have continued to develop during the Abe administration, as shown in graph 1, which indicates that both China and Japan view each other as "violent" with percentages above 70%. Thus, the tensions between China and Japan at the border are further exacerbated by these negative sentiments (historical legacies) because both countries continue to view each other through a negative lens. For example, China still harbors resentment towards Japan for its wartime atrocities and perceives that Japan has not sufficiently apologized for its mistakes. Therefore, the majority of the Chinese public view Japanese people with the stereotype of a "threat of violence" (Stokes, 2016). Similarly, Japan sees China as arrogant and nationalist. These perception issues indicate that China and Japan tend to find it difficult to find opportunities for cooperation and peacefully resolve the conflict, leading Japan to view China as a threat.

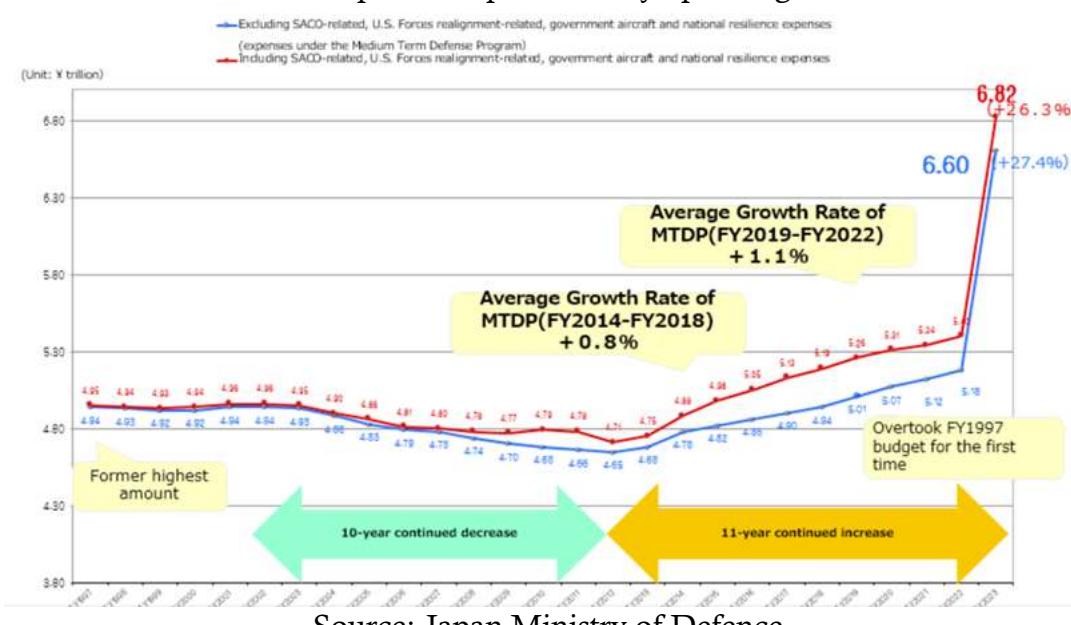
Domestic Motives

Japanese Public and Elite

Even though Shinzo Abe is no longer the Prime Minister of Japan, the ambitious vision he built for Japan over the course of approximately 8 years has not changed much under the administrations of Yoshihide Suga and Fumio Kishida. Considering the fact that both Suga and Kishida belong to the LDP party, they tend to follow Abe's ambitions and revisionist vision. None of them lean towards a direction contrary to Abe's vision, so the policies established during Abe's tenure continue, especially the efforts to enhance Japan's military power. The discourse on revising the Japanese constitution has always contradicted public opinion, especially during the Abe era. The majority of the public does not support constitutional revisions due to anti-militarism sentiments, where they reject the increase in military power out of fear of another war and increased government control over civilians. Therefore, the majority of the public does not support post-war constitutional revision ideas in Japan (Smith & Teraoka, Early Postwar Attitudes on Constitutional Revision, 2016). Generally, elites tend to act in line with public interests to gain support, especially in a

democratic system. However, Abe acted differently by ignoring public protests and continuing to push Japan towards a more militaristic direction, in line with the evolving security situation in the region (Madison, 2019, p. 124).

Graphic 2. Japan Military Spending



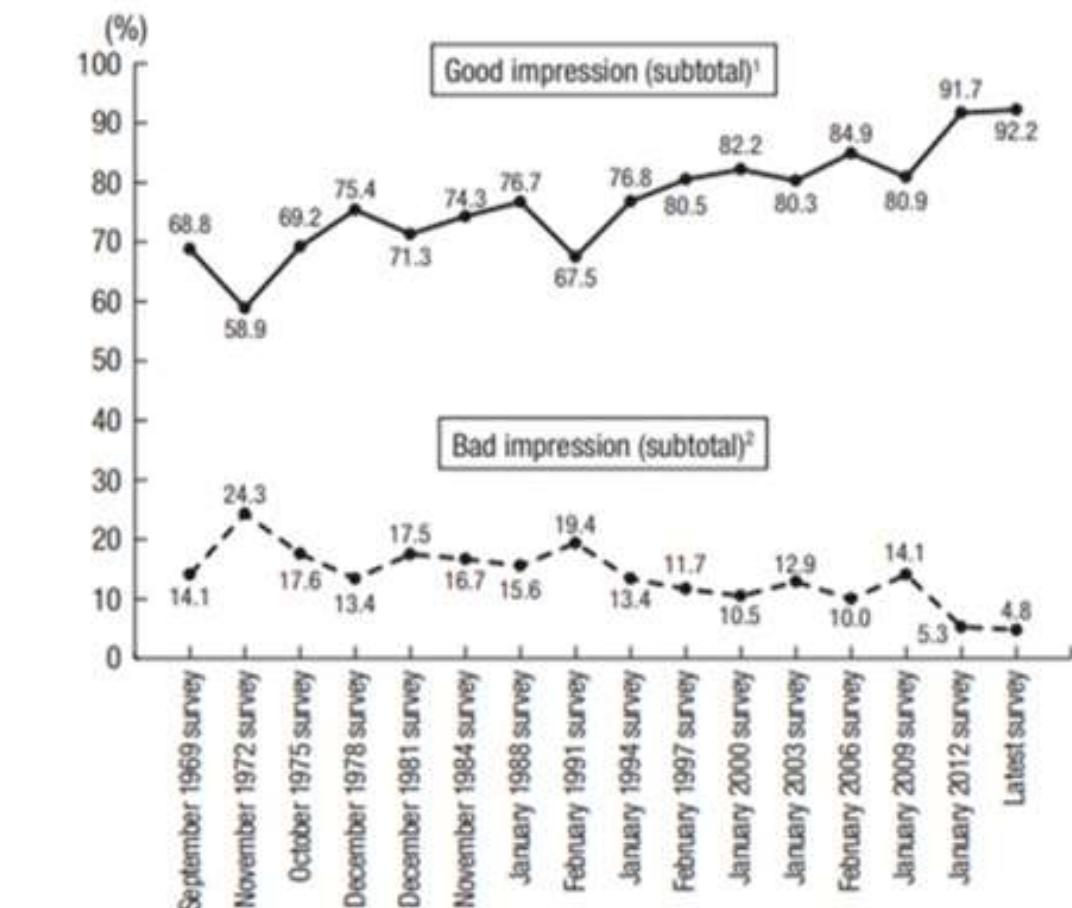
Source: Japan Ministry of Defence

Although without constitutional revisions, Japan's power has still increased, ranking 8th in the world in 2020 (Global Fire Power, 2023). Despite constitutional constraints, Japan maintains its position as a powerful nation, which proves that Japan is moving towards a more militaristic path. According to graph 3, military spending has been increasing every year since 2012, the year Shinzo Abe returned as Japan's leader (Japan Ministry of Defense, 2022). Interestingly, after Abe's resignation, particularly during Fumio Kishida's administration, the military budget for 2023 skyrocketed to ¥6.82 trillion (a 26% increase from the previous year). Based on the latest Defense Buildup Program, it is projected to rise to ¥8.9 trillion by 2027 (Japan Ministry of Defense, 2023). In addition to increasing military spending, Kishida also managed to achieve domestic consensus to develop counterstrike capabilities (based on the NSS), which had a significant impact on Japan's military defense system. The increase in military spending follows the militarization and potential military conflicts in the surrounding region of Japan, primarily due to China's consistent presence in securing its national interests in East Asia (the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and

China's unilateral claim on Taiwan) (Liff, Kishida the Accelerator: Japan's Defense Evolution after Abe, 2023, p. 78).

With this situation, the Japanese public tends to support the increase in Japan's military capabilities. This is largely related to the public's dislike of China's activities in the region surrounding Japan, making it important for the public to prioritize maintaining security.

Graphic 3 Japan Impression of SDF



Source: Ministry of Defence

In 2015, Abe implemented policy reforms by enacting the "peace and security legislation." This legislation included revisions to 10 laws, reinterpretation of Article 9, and the enactment of the New International Peace Support Bill (Liff, 2018). The policy reforms aimed to expand the assignments of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) and provide opportunities for Japan to gradually enhance its military power. This policy triggered protests by thousands of Japanese citizens who viewed it as violating the principles of pacifism (VoA, 2015). In response, Abe made a statement that the "primary role of the SDF

would be non-military disaster relief...while national defense was considered of secondary importance" (Midford & Scott, 2008, p. 128). This statement was intended to shape public perception in a positive direction: the JSDF was meant to address non-military issues such as natural disasters and humanitarian concerns. As a result, surveys conducted by the Ministry of Defense showed an increase in public trust in the JSDF up to 2015 (graph 3) (Kennedy, 2018, pp. 44-46). It can be observed that from 2009 to 2012, public trust surged after witnessing the role of the JSDF in the earthquake and tsunami that occurred on 11 Maret 2011 (3/11 Event).

The event of 3/11 provided an opportunity for the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) to get closer to the public by directly engaging in disaster-stricken areas to provide assistance and relief to the victims. Interestingly, even during the vulnerable period of 2012-2015, public trust in the JSDF continued to increase. Despite the Japanese public's general rejection of militarism (especially in 2015 when Abe implemented several security policy reforms), trust in the JSDF remained high. This means that the government's mediation, by assigning the JSDF to non-military sectors, had a positive impact on increasing public trust. Furthermore, the Japanese public's perception of China as a threat also played a significant role in the public's belief that strengthening the JSDF was reasonable.

Although public opinion is sometimes not fully taken into account, it provides stimulus to the perception of threats. The public offers an objective view (considered neutral in political interests) of the security conditions they perceive. For example, when China frequently engages in activities in the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, the public holds a negative view because they feel that such actions threaten national security. Therefore, the public does not directly influence policies, but it confirms the security conditions and serves as legitimacy for policymakers that the decisions taken (in response to China's aggression) are not merely ambitious decisions made by the elites. So, although the decisions of the elites and the public in Japan sometimes do not align, there is a shared perception of the threat posed by China. In 2022, Japan's perception of China as a threat was explained in the National Security Strategy (China being considered the main security threat to Japan), and this was followed by an increase in public support

for the development of the JSDF. Approximately 41.5% of the Japanese public expressed a desire to enhance the JSDF, which was a 10.4% increase compared to 2018 (Kosuke, 2023). This fact shows that even though the public may have suspicions about the Japanese government, the increasing vulnerability caused by China is perceived by both the elites and the public. However, the assumption that the public fears that remilitarization will lead to the return of Japan's militaristic government and strengthen civilian control was a concern for the elites. Nevertheless, the elites seemed more determined to push ambitious policies without paying much attention to public protests (as seen during Shinzo Abe's era in 2015).

So, how does public opinion influence Japan's security policy? As mentioned earlier, the Japanese public's resistance to remilitarization tends to remain stable, particularly in rejecting the revision of the Japanese Constitution, which is a crucial constraint in formulating Japan's security policy, especially during Abe's era. Therefore, the elites cannot fully control the direction of policies because they are still bound by the constitutional rules (Smith, 2019, p. 28). On the other hand, China's threat has become a clear issue for Japan's security, and the public is also aware of this. In fact, the public considers China's actions in the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, which are Japanese territorial waters, as an invasion (Japan Cabinet Office, 2019). Regarding this, James Simpson argues, "both countries feel they are on a path to conflict – although not necessarily military conflict" (Simpson, 2020). As of now, military escalation has not occurred, but the dispute continues to escalate to a dangerous level for both countries, so it is not surprising that both the elites and the public feel its impact.

Due to the increasing threat from China, it has influenced the public opinion in Japan towards China and also towards security policies (especially in the Kishida era). As a result, the decision-making process regarding Japan's security policies will face less opposition from the public. This also has an impact on Kishida's achievements in the significant changes to Japan's security policies, which are increasingly moving towards an ambitious level (counterstrike capabilities, military budget, and strengthening military cooperation with allies) because the Kishida administration does not face as much opposition

domestically as the Shinzo Abe era (Liff, 2018). In short, the Japanese public opinion becomes an important factor that influences the outcomes of Japan's domestic decision-making process, and the change in the Japanese public opinion due to the threat from China confirms not only the national threat but also explains the perception of an increased level of threat that is felt by the Japanese public.

The Main Motivation for Japan's Remilitarization

Japan's remilitarization is to enhance its military capacity and capabilities beyond the limits of self-defense or moving away from pacifism. The Japanese government's intention to strengthen its military power is not like the militaristic, expansionist, and civilian control of the World War era. However, remilitarization portrays a country that can defend itself and cooperate with its allies through international rules and norms to create regional and global stability (in line with the vision of FOIP). According to Corey Wallace's view, "For 'self-defense' reasons, Japan can legally destroy ballistic missile equipment in the DPRK if the DPRK is about to attack Japan. This is called 'preemption' and is considered self-defensive" (Wallace, 2020). This opinion aligns with the principle of military defense that prioritizes deterrence, thus making Japan's decision to develop counterstrike capabilities highly reasonable. This military strategy only ensures that if Japan is ever attacked, the consideration that Japan has the capability to launch a counterattack reaching the aggressor's bases can reduce the intention or possibility of such a direct attack.

Based on the theory of the perception of threat (Jervis, 1978), the question of who shapes Japan's perception has been explained, where this article assumes that Japan's perception of the threat from China is representative of both the public and the elite. Although the drive for remilitarization is dominated by the elite, the contribution of the public to the success of Japan's more assertive security policy cannot be ignored. In line with Jervis's claim that a state viewing another state as an enemy will react stronger and faster than usual (Jervis, 1978). This explains why Japan continues to push for remilitarization, disregarding protests from the Japanese public in the process, and eventually, Japan gradually achieves its ambitious vision, mostly initiated by Shinzo Abe over several years.

Therefore, the effect of the security dilemma will operate stronger due to Japan's perception of the threat from China, causing them to continually seek greater power, thus reducing the chances of cooperation (Jervis, 1978, p. 173). Although Japan's intentions are defensive, the vulnerability exacerbates the operation of the security dilemma, which will worsen the relationship between China and Japan in the future.

Furthermore, due to the confirmed perception of threat and security dilemma, it can be concluded that Japan regards China as an enemy, and China's military buildup accelerates Japan's remilitarization efforts. Thus, Japan's primary motivation for remilitarization is its perception of the Chinese threat. Even at the domestic level, China's threat is a concern for the Japanese public and elites due to the vulnerability faced by Japan, which further expedites remilitarization. Consequently, future disputes between China and Japan will worsen due to the perceived threat that portrays China as offensive. This will prompt Japan to continue enhancing its military power, thereby reducing opportunities for cooperation and exacerbating its military rivalry with China. However, the likelihood of escalation will decrease because Japan's remilitarization remains defensive, and the development of its military systems and technologies, particularly in defensive strategies, prevents total war from occurring. As Japan's military build-up in traditional domains (such as maritime and aerial domains, as well as counterstrike capabilities) tends to be defensive, the situation in the future will not be as dire as predicted by the realist paradigm.

Conclusion

This article explains that Japan's security and foreign policies have been at their most ambitious level since the return of Shinzo Abe's leadership in 2012 until the present. However, Abe's policies have always faced criticism from the Japanese public due to the anti-militarism sentiment prevalent among the public, which has been the main obstacle for Japan to develop its military strength. Nonetheless, neither Yoshihide Suga nor Fumio Kishida opposed or deviated from the revisionist ideology associated with Abe, thereby keeping Abe's ambitious vision alive into the Kishida era. With the increasing Chinese threat, the Japanese public's support for military development has grown, making it

easier for Japan to make security policy decisions with less opposition. Kishida's achievements in increasing military spending, developing counterstrike capabilities, and strengthening security cooperation with allies are crucial for the future development of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), given the increasing vulnerability to conflicts primarily caused by China's aggressiveness in the region. The difficulty in finding a resolution to the disputes between the two countries worsens Japan's perception of China, as evidenced by China's consistent activities around Japanese territory (e.g., intrusions in the waters around the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands). Thus, this article explains that Japan's primary motivation for remilitarization is its perception of the threat posed by China, which is confirmed by the Japanese public and government (elites), as well as by China's ongoing aggressive activities. On the other hand, domestic motives, such as the dominance of elites with a strategic role in policy-making, are considered a weaker motive as they are still limited by public opposition (as seen during the Abe era) and are more influenced by Japan's systemic-level vulnerabilities.

On the other hand, public opinion can influence policy-making to a certain extent (either hindering or legitimizing), as well as confirming the development of tensions or the perception of threats towards China (assuming that the public is more neutral than political interests). However, the role of elites, particularly Abe's vision in the development of Japan's security policies, remains important in shaping a clear and sensible vision (despite facing significant opposition during his era). This allows his successors, Suga and Kishida (who are still within the political framework of the LDP), to inherit ideological principles and frameworks (e.g., FOIP and constitutional interpretation) as foundations for developing Japan's military policies. It should be noted that none of these Japanese Prime Ministers held different views on Japan's perception of China's aggressiveness. This aligns with Jervis' claim that policymakers will act according to the vulnerabilities they perceive or the magnitude of the threat they face. Therefore, these elites disregarded public opposition (especially during the Abe era) to enhance Japan's defense capabilities in response to China's escalating aggressive activities around Japanese territory, particularly in the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands area.

Considering the increasing power of both countries, the negative perceptions they hold towards each other, and the difficulty in identifying opportunities for cooperation to address disputes in the region (e.g., the Diaoyu/Senkaku conflict), the future of the relationship between the two countries appears increasingly bleak. However, due to Japan's remilitarization being defensive in nature, the relationship between China and Japan in the future, which seems to be on a path of conflict, will not be as dire because there is a lack of incentives for escalation.

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